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Soviet Dismissal Now Being Laid To a Policy Split

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 12 — A senior Soviet diplomat has told United States officials that Marshal Nikolai V. Ogarkov was dismissed as chief of the General Staff because he was showing "unpartylike tendencies," Administration officials said today.

They said the comment was made Friday, when the Soviet press agency Tass said that Marshal Ogarkov had been replaced by his deputy, Marshal Sergei F. Akhromeyev.

The officials said similar remarks had been heard earlier from other Soviet diplomats about Marshal Ogarkov. The officials said they did not know whether the comment on Friday was made on instructions from Moscow or on the diplomat's own speculation.

To protect diplomatic confidentiality, Administration officials provided the information on the understanding the diplomat would not be identified.

His comment has been accepted within the Government as a possible sign that Marshal Ogarkov might have been dismissed because of disagreements with policy-makers on military appropriations.

If, in fact, it was a policy dispute that led up to the dismissal, officials said, a manifestation of it might have been an interview with Marshal Ogarkov published May 9 in Krasnaya Zvezda, the armed forces newspaper.

In the interview, Marshal Ogarkov seemed to argue that the deployment of American medium-range missiles in Western Europe did not increase the chances of a "first strike" against the Soviet Union because the two sides recognized that neither superpower could escape a retaliatory strike.

He said that it was more likely, in view of the nuclear deadlock, for the next war to be fought with modern conventional forces equipped with the latest technology. He implied that the Soviet Union was behind in this field and had to spend more to keep up with the West, adding that the Communist Party must "unconditionally fulfill" its promise to keep the country militarily strong.

American officials said today that the interview was promptly labeled by intelligence people as significant because it seemed to say that the emphasis placed in the past on nuclear missiles, such as the medium-range SS-20's, should now be placed on conventional forces.

Text Was Passed On to Reagan

The text of the interview was called to the attention of Secretary of State George P. Shultz, who in turn gave it to President Reagan, a State Department official said.

In the interview, Marshal Ogarkov said in reference to nuclear weapons:

"You do not have to be a military man or a scientist to realize that a further buildup is becoming senseless. Nonetheless, this buildup is continuing, through the fault of the United States."

"As a result, a paradox arises: On the one hand, it would seem, there is a process of steadily increasing potential for the nuclear powers to destroy the enemy, and, on the other hand, there is an equally steady and, I would say, even steeper reduction in the potential for an aggressor to inflict a so-called disabling strike on his principal enemy. The point is that, with the quantity and diversity of nuclear missiles already achieved, it has become impossible to destroy the enemy's systems with a single strike."

"A crushing retaliatory strike against the aggressor, even with the limited quantity of nuclear warheads remaining to the defender, a strike inflicting unacceptable damage, becomes inevitable in present conditions."

Gains in Conventional Arms

Marshal Ogarkov went on to point out that "rapid changes" in conventional weapons, such as unmanned aircraft, cruise missiles with conventional warheads and new electronic control systems, had enhanced "the destructive potential of conventional weapons, bringing them closer, so to speak, to weapons of mass destruction in terms of their effectiveness."

"The sharply increased range of conventional weapons makes it possible to immediately extend active combat operations not just to the border regions, but to the entire territory of a country, which was not possible in past wars," he said.

"This qualitative leap in the development of conventional means of destruction will inevitably entail a change in the nature of the preparation and conduct of operations, which will in turn make it possible to conduct military operations using conventional systems in qualitatively new, incomparably more destructive forms than before."

Advances in Weapons Noted

After noting that technological advance could produce "even more destructive and previously unknown types of weapons," Marshal Ogarkov said:

"Work on these new types of weapons is already in progress in a number of countries, for example, in the United States. Their development is a reality of the very near future, and it would be a serious mistake not to consider it right now. This, in turn, cannot fail to change established notions of the methods and forms of armed struggle and even of the military might of the state."

He noted that Konstantin U. Chernenko, the Soviet leader, had said in April that "the present situation requires us to make constant, all-around efforts to safeguard the country's security."

"This demand must be unconditionally fulfilled," Marshal Ogarkov said.

To give his argument more weight, Marshal Ogarkov quoted Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx's collaborator, as having said that "nothing depends on economic conditions as much as the army and navy."

Engels on Military Affairs

According to the marshal, Engels said:

"Advances in technology, the moment they become usable and can be applied in practice in military affairs, have the immediate effect — almost forcibly and often against the will of the military command — of causing changes and even revolutions in the methods of waging war."

The new Soviet Chief of Staff, Marshal Akhromeyev, in an interview on American television on Monday, said Marshal Ogarkov's stepping aside had been a routine reassignment and of no particular significance. United States Government analysts generally reject that explanation as not credible.

"Soviet diplomats are telling us that Ogarkov was getting too big for his breeches," a senior State Department official said today. "We don't really know what happened inside the Soviet policy-making establishment, and so it is all speculation."

And one Government analyst said: "It does look as if he probably was unhappy with the way the Soviet economy was servicing the Soviet military and may have wanted more of a commitment than he could get."